

Crime on the rise in El Dorado County

<u>Yearly Crime Trends</u>							
	Homicide	Forcible Rape	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Larceny	Motor Veh Theft
YEAR							
2007	3	20	24	960	652	1350	32
2008	7	18	21	893	738	1286	15
2009	3	33	34	1033	715	1129	18
2010	3	15	34	976	864	1114	12
2011	2	21	21	899	1020	1241	12
2012	5	14	22	950	1252	772	18
2013	2	26	17	841	1276	749	52
2014	3	36	23	882	640	1320	21
2015	9	48	32	776	579	1414	43

Source: *El Dorado County Sheriff's Office*

Crime went up in El Dorado County in 2015 compared to 2014.

Sheriff's investigators want another year of data to be able to analyze if the change is because of Proposition 47. That is the voter-approved initiative that changed how some crimes are reported as well as the sentences for them.

One reason the number of rapes escalated is that as of Jan 1, 2015, that data includes reports not previously reported. There was also a change in reporting criteria for auto thefts as of that same date.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

EDC supes hope strategic plan is guiding light

By Joann Eisenbrandt

PLACERVILLE – Accountability. Integrity. Service excellence. Collaboration. These are the four organization core values that form the foundation of the three-year strategic plan El Dorado County is in the process of developing.

Work on the plan began in September 2014, when the Board of Supervisors had its first special workshop to discuss the county's mission, vision and value statements, and establish a framework for a county strategic plan. The county had attempted to craft strategic plans in the past, most recently in 2007 and 2010, but they were never fully implemented.

Sherman Fox, the county's training and organizational development specialist, has been facilitating the strategic plan process since December 2014. He told *Lake Tahoe News*, "My role is the process. I'm the keeper of the document. But this wouldn't have happened unless the board all wanted this. I believe we can have the change that everybody wants. This county wants to go in a different direction. We just have to develop the process to get there."

Since then, the strategic plan has been taking shape. The county's vision statement and mission statement were reviewed and revised, and strategic plan goals were developed and adopted by the board in March 2015. Five "goal-setting" groups were formed, comprised of members of the board, county department heads and other staff, members of other community organizations and members of the public. No one was assigned to a specific group, but all chose the group they wanted to

serve on. Each group focused on one of the five defined county strategic goals: healthy communities, economic development, public safety, infrastructure, and good county governance. The groups then began developing objectives and measures to achieve these goals. So far, they have focused on “macro” measures at the board level, but eventually “micro” measures will follow from these with specific strategies and implementation plans at the department and staff levels.

Fox sees a difference between the current process and past failed attempts. “The county has attempted to develop a strategic plan other times, but this is the first time where we have the majority of the county leadership and public engaged in the process. It’s important to have as many major stakeholders involved as possible. It’s hard to implement a plan if you don’t have majority buy-in.”

But defining “majority buy-in” can be tricky. The views of government officials and prominent community leaders on key county issues are well known. They are visibly and vocally involved in the decision-making process, whether as proponents or opponents. Finding out what the “ordinary” El Dorado County resident believes can be more elusive.

In mid-summer 2015, Fox explained, the strategic plan process came to a halt for this very reason. In order to gain broad-based input from residents on where they thought El Dorado County should go from here the county conducted a citizen engagement survey. An outside consultant, the Kiely Group, was hired to create the survey and then tabulate the results. It was posted on the county website, the city of Placerville website, in local newspapers and as a link from Facebook sites of relevant community groups. Town hall meetings were conducted by each supervisor to discuss the survey. Hard copies of the survey were also distributed throughout county communities.

Four focus groups were created and met in late 2015 in

Placerville, Cameron Park and South Lake Tahoe. The goal was to get more insight into some key questions such as, "What is meant by rural when citizens refer to 'keeping the county rural?'" "How will we know El Dorado isn't run by a 'Good Ol' Boy' network?" "What evidence is needed to show that the Tahoe basin is included in county government planning/decisions/services?" Focus group findings were included in the final survey report.

Of El Dorado County's 183,087 residents as measured by the 2010 census, 2,228 responded to the survey. The 99-page final report includes quantitative data on the demographics of who responded, where they lived, their age, employment status and so on. It also included qualitative or narrative data where comments reflecting priorities and concerns of respondents in each of the five goal areas were recorded as well as their overall view of service priorities, how much and where they wanted the county to grow, and how well they felt county government reflected their values.

At the Jan 26, Board of Supervisors meeting, Kiely Group CEO Laree Kiely presented an overview of the survey's purpose and results. As the survey's executive summary states, the objective was to gather information about citizens' thoughts and priorities to include in the strategic plan, as well as to test the most effective ways to reach out and engage citizens. "We did accomplish this," Kiely told the board.

Kiely said the survey response rate "was impressive," and explained that this was a representative sample, where the percentage of respondents in each category, such as age, match the actual percentage of that same category as shown in county census data. Random sampling, she noted, is not used because there is a bias in who answers and it is not a representative sample of the population demographics. The survey, Kiely told the board, has a confidence level of 95-99 percent with a 3 percent margin of error.

Ninety-five percent of respondents lived in El Dorado County full time, 62 percent were female, more than 68 percent were over the age of 50, most respondents were from Placerville and El Dorado Hills, a little more than half worked within county boundaries, and 7.33 percent considered themselves “actively” involved with county issues.

At the meeting, several questions about the validity of the survey’s results were brought up. First, was what some termed a disproportionate amount of responses from government employees. Of the 2,228 respondents, 435 were government employees. While Kiely said the survey didn’t ask respondents whether they were county, city, or federal government employees, the county had sent out two emails to its employees with a direct link to the survey. District 3 Supervisor Brian Veerkamp reminded the board, “Remember, all those government workers live here and the issues are relevant to them too.” Kiely said her group would pull out that data to check and see if it “skewed” the survey in any way.

Another concern was the fact that some people took the survey more than once, getting around the built-in IP address filtering by responding from different computers. Kiely said this would have had to have happened in very large numbers to affect the validity of the results. She added that they will go back and address this issue, but added it may also indicate the surfacing of another issue—a trust issue. District 5 Supervisor Sue Novasel agreed, “There is a general lack of trust in the county and it needs to be addressed at a very high level.”

Survey results appear to bear this out. When asked how El Dorado County government reflects their values with regard to accountability, accessibility, transparency, integrity and trustworthiness, respondents generally gave the county low marks. They were asked to “grade” the degree to which the county lived up to these values on a scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The number of survey

takers who together answered either “disagree” or “strongly disagree” for each category was: Accountability 548; Accessibility 396; Transparency 462; Integrity 611; and Trustworthiness 645. For each of the five categories, approximately 500 respondents indicated they were “neutral.”

Kiely noted that narrative data may be more important than the demographics. The survey included more than 40 pages of verbatim responses to questions. District 2 Supervisor Shiva Frentzen said she had read all of the comments, but also wanted to know what county districts they were coming from. This connection does not appear in the survey report. Kiely noted that the raw data belongs to the county and this can be pulled out.

District 4 Supervisor Michael Ranalli added, “There is much more to this exercise than science ... it’s our willingness to reach out to the public and ask them ... it’s about our willingness to learn what they want.”

Respondents identified the county’s top challenges as growth/development and roads/traffic, followed by water/drought, business development and jobs. Across all age groups, the majority wanted “moderate growth” in new housing and business development, with more growth preferred by the younger age groups. As the survey noted, “The people appear to be accepting to some growth as long as it is done in alignment with the resources and values of the county.” Very few respondents knew what supervisorial district they lived in or all the services the county provides. Only 200 respondents self-identified their district, with the rest being identified by the consultant from the communities they said they lived in.

Novasel spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* about the importance to residents in the Tahoe basin that they are included in county decision-making. “I did a **town hall meeting**,” she said, “and we went over the survey and I think the biggest thing that

struck me is how difficult it is because the county seat is so far away for the county to be responsive to the needs of Tahoe residents. It's my job to make sure they are responsive. The basin has special needs and they are often different than those of the West Slope. For example, we have TRPA and that changes the dynamics. We need better two-way communication. My hope is that the county will consider hiring a public information officer during the next round of budget talks."

When asked in a survey question what the county would look like if it functioned at its most effective and efficient levels, representative responses included:

"Ask the residents their opinions and then follow them." "Easy to contact for information, questions and requests." "More money spent on roads and replacing narrow bridges." "A better flow of information and more transparency." "A richly diverse community that is healthy, sustainable, economically viable, resource-rich with a highly engaged population that is aware of and involved with making these things happen." "Good health services to meet the needs of youth, general population and the elderly."

"El Dorado County needs a balanced, well-thought-out long range plan that acknowledges constraints (water, jobs); preservation of a rural lifestyle is important. El Dorado County is on the brink of making decisions that will shape the face of the county; it's important to get this right." "The vocal minority should not be considered more in decisions than the silent majority."

The entire Citizen Engagement Survey including all the verbatim responses can be found online. www.edcgov.us.

On Feb. 2, the board had a workshop where each of the five "goal-setting" teams gave a presentation on their work to date on their specific strategic goal and explained the objectives and macro measures identified for reaching it. The discussion

emphasized that none of these goals could be reached in isolation and that there were many overlapping areas where cooperation and coordination among county departments and community organizations will be key.

Sherman Fox coordinated the discussion and asked those present, "What does it take for El Dorado County to adopt a strategic plan and live by it and allow it to provide guidance?" Everyone agreed that previous strategic plans had failed because there was no firm commitment to follow-through. Veerkamp pointed to the fact that, "In the past, the county hasn't used the strategic plan document as an accountability document." Supervisor Ranalli added, "We are accountable by asking how what we consider relates to the priorities of the strategic plan ... (it) also says what things are not a priority, so we don't get distracted and get into the weeds."

Kris Payne, a retired county engineer and member of the Infrastructure team, said he hadn't, "seen this level of team building in my 30 years of county employment."

The next step in the strategic plan process will occur in March or early April. There will be an all-day event at the county government center in Placerville. The five goal-setting teams will be assembled in individual rooms and each supervisor will have a 45-minute session with each team to ask questions and get information. Members of the public will also be invited to attend. A second day will be set aside for the board to meet in a workshop format and discuss what they've learned, and go over any additional information provided. If the board is fully satisfied with the plan's final design, it will then be formally adopted. The goal is to have an adopted strategic plan in place before the county begins budget talks later in the spring so that the plan's priorities can be transferred over into actual budget allocations.

None of the participants at Tuesday's workshop expects change to happen overnight. They see it as a longer, five- to 10-year

process. This latest strategic plan could meet the fate of previous ones and gather dust on some obscure county shelf. Or it could be the starting point for improved internal county communication, increased citizen input and an enhanced level of confidence that El Dorado County is moving forward in the direction desired by those who live here.

Catching rainwater in Nevada is illegal

By Jaime Hayde, KRNV-TV

The Truckee River surged to its highest peak on Saturday since 2012 thanks to recent storms, bringing into light the issue of collecting rainwater.

In Nevada, it's illegal to catch rainwater with any type of system. However, the hot topic could be up for debate during the next legislative session.

Nevada law states that collecting rainwater with any type of rain catching systems, whether it's with a rain barrel or even a bucket, is illegal. And Nevada's state Engineer believes that law should change.

Read the whole story

Group launched to help Nevada thrive in development of autonomous cars



Nevada wants to be a leader
in driverless cars.
Photo/Steve Jurvetson

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

An economic development organization Tuesday approved the formation of the Center for Advanced Mobility, part of a state initiative to place Nevada on the cutting edge of automobile technology at a time when the industry is quickly pushing to develop autonomous vehicles.

The center will fall under the Nevada Institute for Autonomous Systems, a nonprofit group that currently coordinates with the Governor's Office of Economic Development to oversee the state's designation as a federal drone test site and help develop the state's unmanned aerial industry.

Read the whole story

2 suspects sought in S. Lake Tahoe homicide



Suspect No. 1:
Black, male, 6-
foot-3, 200 pounds,
late 20s-early 30s,
black hair in
braids or
dreadlocks



Suspect No. 2:
Black or mixed race
man with light

complexion, 5-foot-8, 170 pounds, late 20s-early 30s, black hair with tight curls.

South Lake Tahoe police are looking for two men who may be connected to the fatal shooting last weekend of an Amador County man.

Dennis Wright Jr., 40 was gunned down in the parking lot of the Beverly Lodge on Jan. 30 about 7:45pm. His friend Kendra Ghiorso told officers they were there to sell about 100 pounds of marijuana.

The suspects allegedly attempted to rob Wright and Ghiorso at gunpoint for the cash involved in the drug deals. Multiple shots were fired at Wright, who died that night at Barton Memorial Hospital.

The vehicle the men left in resembles a tan 2004 Chrysler Concorde or older sedan.

Anyone who may have information is asked to call 530.542.6100 or Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Future of South Lake Tahoe's roads, recreation facilities

may end up in voters' hands

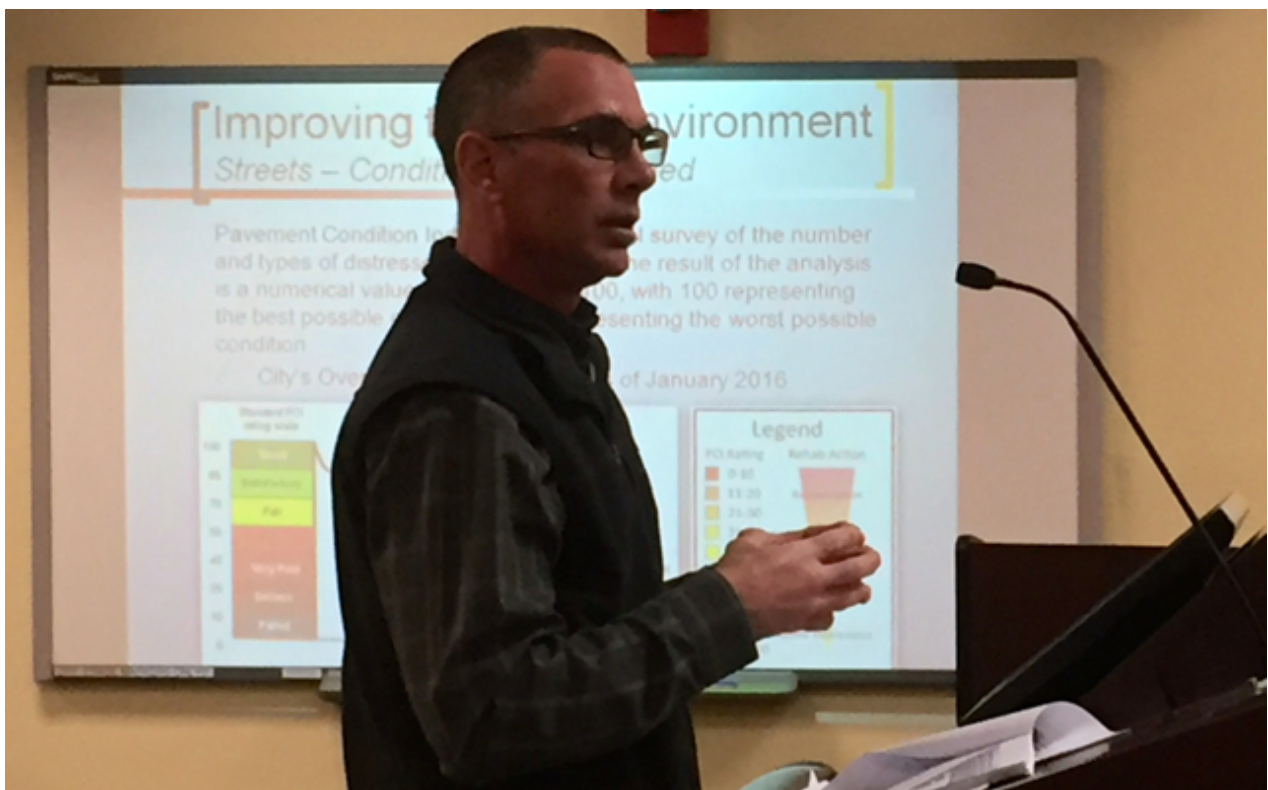
By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe voters will likely be asked in November to raise taxes in order to pay for a laundry list of needs and wants that was discussed by the City Council on Tuesday.

"We need ongoing funding for long-term capital needs," City Manager Nancy Kerry stressed.

As was pointed out in her presentation of the business plan, "Without a long-term funding strategy, the city will continue funding projects based on current needs and available resources."

While the city under Kerry's leadership has been able to balance the budget without dipping into reserves, the city hasn't been able to get ahead on major capital improvements. The deferred maintenance on roads, facilities and vehicles continues to mount.



Jim Marino, South Lake Tahoe assistant public works director, outlines what needs fixing in the city.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

Financial options

Increasing the hotel tax by 2 percent, adding one-half cent to the sales tax and creating an amusement tax were all talked about at the Feb. 2 meeting.

Recreation and roads would probably be the two main beneficiaries of the influx of cash.

The finance subcommittee, which historically has been comprised of the mayor (Wendy David) and mayor pro tem (Austin Sass), is tasked with further investigating the options, reaching out to the potentially affected entities and bringing back a proposal to the entire council.

Jerry Bindel and Pat Ronan, both who work in the lodging industry and are on the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association and Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority's boards, spoke in favor of the three taxes, saying they should all be on the same ballot.

They believe if a 2 percent increase in the transient occupancy tax were to be agreed to, that all of the money should be devoted to recreation. Specifying the recreation complex, 56-acre project and Regan Beach would satisfy needing to narrow the use for the money. Ballot language could also dedicate revenue for operation and maintenance of the facilities.

Bindel and Ronan are of the mindset that improved recreation facilities will lead to more tournaments in a variety of athletic disciplines coming to town, which in turn puts heads in beds. They admitted the initial tax spike might deter some people, but ultimately the improvements would bring even more guests.

Tournaments tend to attract people who stay longer and aren't just on the weekends, and can be in the shoulder seasons.

The current TOT is 10 percent throughout much of South Lake Tahoe, 12 percent in the redevelopment area. The former goes into the city's general fund, the latter mostly to pay off the bond debt. The Tourism Improvement District, which was formed in 2006, tacks on another \$3.50 or \$4 per night. TID uses that money for marketing.

Raising taxes for a specified use would require a two-thirds approval. Bindel and Ronan believe that's possible to achieve and pledged the lodging association's backing. This came after City Councilman Tom Davis was adamant the only thing increased taxes should go toward is roads. Davis is on the lodging board representing his company, not the city. When it comes to a vote of the council regarding the TOT Davis will not be able to participate because he could benefit from it.

It's also possible to ask voters to raise the TOT and not have the dollars earmarked for anything in particular. A second question could ask what they want the money to go to – recreation? roads? something else? That would be an advisory vote and not something any council would have to honor. However, City Manager Kerry pointed out not following the voters' desires could derail their political careers.

One reason to not specify where the dollars would go is that this would only require a 50 percent plus one vote, which would be easier to accomplish than 66 percent. Also, more than one priority could be funded.

Another advantage to this scenario is that if the money initially went toward recreation, the presumed added revenue from those facilities could then go toward roads and/or some other project.

The gamble is if voters don't set recreation as a priority for the TOT dollars.

The city briefly raised the hotel tax via Measure Z in November 2002. This added \$1 to every hotel room. It was in place from Feb. 1, 2004, to Oct. 31, 2006. It brought in about \$1.1 million a year.

Raising the sales tax was already done once. It went from 7.25 percent to 7.75 percent after voters gave the go-ahead in November 2004. All of this “extra” revenue goes right to South Lake Tahoe, whereas the bulk goes to the state.

An amusement tax could be assessed to ski and bike rental, scenic rides on Heavenly’s gondola and other items.



Dodging pot holes in South Lake Tahoe is getting more difficult.

What needs fixing

Jim Marino, assistant public works director, spoke about the \$35 million need in the next five years for capital replacement, the \$50 million five-year community investment and the \$24 million five-year environmental improvement list.

It's estimated the rec center needs \$13 million. It hasn't been decided if it will be refurbished, overhauled or demolished and rebuilt.

Regan Beach improvements are expected to cost \$9 million.

Nothing will happen to the 56-acre area until the city and county resolve ownership-lease issues there. The city is reluctant to invest sizably in a parcel it doesn't own. If another lease is pursued, Kerry said she would like it to be for 99 years.

The campground that sits on those 56 acres is in need of some basic, albeit pricy, renovations like bathrooms.

Marino would like a minimum investment of \$3 million a year for roads. In a 20-year span this would bring them to a level that he said would no longer be embarrassing.

He also stressed the importance of maintaining the roads that have been overhauled so they don't get into such a state of disrepair that they cost the city more money in the long run.

South Lake Tahoe brothers

involved in stabbing

An altercation between two brothers on Tuesday night ended with one behind bars and the other in the hospital.

Christopher Amato, 24, of South Lake Tahoe was arrested Feb. 2 on assault with a deadly weapon charges. Bail was set at \$25,000.

His stepbrother, who is in his 30s, was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital with a non-life threatening stab wound to his abdomen.

Officers responded about 6:35pm Tuesday to the 1400 block of Melba Drive. They found the victim in front of the residence and the suspect inside. They live there with their mom.

Officers are still investigating what led to the confrontation. A knife about 5-inches long was recovered.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. has more control over education dollars

By Joy Resmovits, Los Angeles Times

Starting next year, California and seven other states will have more control over how they spend the millions of federal dollars tied to a questionable tutoring program.

Under the George W. Bush administration's No Child Left Behind law, schools that serve high concentrations of poor students

and were rated as underperforming for several years were required to set aside money for tutoring, known as “supplemental education services.”

Between 2011 and 2014, California spent \$507 million on these programs. But the California Department of Education routinely received complaints alleging that the tutoring companies provided little feedback on students’ academic progress, fabricated invoices and lied about enrollment and attendance information.

Read the whole story

Study: Drought could worsen fires, feed insects, spur plant die-offs

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

Worsening drought conditions may be doing more damage to forests in California and throughout the West than their ecosystems can handle, causing a spiral of death that could have a devastating impact on land managers, a U.S. Forest Service study concludes.

The 300-page report issued Monday – “Effects of Drought on Forests and Rangelands in the United States” – outlines how hotter, drier and more extreme weather will spark massive insect outbreaks, tree and plant die-offs, bigger and more costly wildfires, and economic impacts to timber and rangeland habitat.

The study by 77 scientists from the Forest Service,

universities, non-governmental organizations and national labs seeks to bring together years of peer-reviewed research and provide the best science to forest and rangeland managers as they grapple with the effects of climate change on the 193 million acres of national forest. There are 21 million acres in California's 18 national forests.

Read the whole story

Feds aim to reduce U.S. water footprint

By Ian James, Desert Sun

The Obama administration has begun an initiative aimed at making the United States more water-efficient, saying the country has the potential to reduce its total water use by a third.

Deputy Interior Secretary Mike Connor said some of the White House's objectives include encouraging more recycling of wastewater and promoting investment in water treatment and desalination technologies.

The White House announced its new "water innovation strategy" last month and plans a summit on March 22, which is World Water Day, focusing on potential solutions to the country's water challenges. The White House said in a fact sheet about the initiative that with improvements in efficiency, better management practices and more widespread adoption of water reuse technology, "we have potential to considerably reduce

water usage by 33 percent.”

Read the whole story